

The Bringing-up of Johnny Fordyce.

A little child shall lead them.

6264 Chap. I. 'A-preparing'

The young Fordyce kept a little stationer's shop in Littlewood. The opening of the shop had been somewhat of a venture, but things went well with the pair, perhaps because they were well-deserving.

Their story was not without a touch of romance: John Fordyce had been the good-looking young postman who brought occasional letters & many circulars to the dingy vicarage of the very poor parish of St. Barnabas: and she — was the vicar's daughter.

who, in default of a letterbox or a maid, opened the door to the postman's knock, & came, by degrees, to look on the intelligent countenance of the young man as the oasis in a rather dreary life. Moral: have a letter-box or your door if you don't keep a maid.

But we must lay to the position in a pretty poor for a moment to the charge of vulgar 'back-door' courtship. It is true Ellen generally opened the door to the young postman's knock, but she never said more than 'Thank you'; & not by as much as a meeting of eyes did the two in clasp in clandestine interlours. The mischief, if mischief it was, had been done at Sunday school, & other parish meetings & treats.

nothing

was said; but when loved, say there is anything in blacker & downcast eyes, his passion was not unreturned.

That was a scene to be remembered, when John Fidge, asking for an interview with the vicar, was shown into the gloomy almost fireless little den, called the Vicar's study, & put on a bold front, &, plump, then there, asked Mr. Bridges for the hand of his daughter Ellen.

If her coachman had asked the Queen for the hand of a royal princess, her surprise could not have been greater than was that of the poor vicar as he listened to this audacious proposition. He forgot that to this very day, his own father & mother kept a small draper's shop in the out-of-the-way town of X. Whether his parents the occupation of his parents, he himself was a gentleman, a Christian man & a devoted clergyman, doing heavy up-hill work in a neglected parish.

£. That his daughter should marry in his own rank
 seemed to him the only fit-thing - who shall
 blame him? He was not-scorned, he was not
 angry, he was only utterly surprised & unapproachable:
 he listened to his father as one would listen to
 proposals for a trip to Saturn.

"No, no; my good fellow: this is pure nonsense! I
 find you are saving & could, as you say, furnish
 him at least as good as this: but, don't you see,
 - I don't want to hurt your feelings - you must feel
 a wife in your own class: Brown's (^{baker} ~~father~~) daughter
 is a nice girl, it would be promotion for
 you to be connected with that family."

There was nothing for it - but to feel angry & -
 reasonable father's planing belonged to the domain of
 fiction. But - pinning maidens apparently belong
 still to that of fact. Ellen pined. She did not
 sulk or idle or have airs: never was a more
 dutiful daughter, a pleasanter or busier girl
 in a house: but she lost flesh, & she lost colour,
 & she lost appetite, & her mother, anyway, could
 not bear to see her child pining.

"But - what in the world does she see in the fellow?
 Don't you think it rather indecent for a girl to
 care for a man beneath her?"

Well, when it comes to that - he was a good young
 man, attended classes - was very decently educated -
 &c. &c. In a word, husband & son - did not

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turn up every day. months were many, & means
were small; & a month had passed, when one
of the dearest eldest-girl, was a consideration of her
before the year was out - it was settled that John
Gordy should be allowed to marry Ellen Bridges.

Soon pretty morning there was a quiet little
wedding in the gloomy dusty church of the Barnabers.
And all the wedding-trip was a quarter of an hour's
journey by train to the neighbouring & 'genteel'
town of Littleton: where John had taken the little station
shopkeeper had seen, & furnished the snug little six-
roomed house that belonged to it. & Ellen was
really not sensible of any downfall; for, as for
letting her wait in the shop - no such thing!
She for her home-work, she was used to that, & it was
far more amusing to keep her own dearest little
house in order than to spend her labours in the
dingy old home which never could look any no
better.

Things went well with the two. Since he was a bit
older, John had had a turn for book-binding: & found
his own 'Boy's Friend' when he was ten, & had for
ever since picking up bits of knowledge & insight as
one does when one has a hobby. He had done
a good deal in that way before he was married, & the
money he saved furnished the quite elegant little
house which was the joy & pride of Mrs. Gordy's heart.
And just lately, he had turned out a thing in vellum

+ told for his Edward Peters - a collection of family papers - that the whole neighbourhood was talking about.

One thing helps another. - When Fred's shop became rather the fashion: you were sure of civility + good things. Then, everything looked as fresh & bright! People didn't know of the hours Ellen spent every morning in dusting + airing, before the shutters were let down, nor of the little family conclaves of two that sat over the burning green stock. It was a prosperous bright little home, & it was no wonder poor harassed Mr. Bridges came over to see the young couple as often as his tender conscience would let him spend pennies on the little journey.

Prosperity has a trick of prospering. & good has a way of getting better. A delicious new hope crept into the lives of the young pair. It was too good to be talked about - in green clay, but the increased kindness of the town, & John's incessant-chivalric care for his wife ~~showed that this delightful~~ ~~thought~~ ~~shape~~ betrayed them, each knew that the other was as a child transported into a world of fairy-land, - living & moving in the vision of the thing which was to be!

The semiochracter is abroad in the land. & John indeed had always a way of interesting himself in things beyond the range of his daily work. Before he was married

married, he had attended a course of lectures on ^{human} physiology. The subject fascinated him: he had made himself acquainted with the writings of two or three well-known ~~anatomists~~ biologists, & the marvellous thing to him was that we make so little practical use of 'Girds' which, if they do not ~~not~~ place in our hands the 'elixir' of the old world, ~~do~~ do, anyway, show how much a man's health & character are in his own hands. "Why, if all this is true, a man might make almost anything he liked of his child, food helping him!" - was his inward comment long before he had that snug little nest in Carlton St.

And now? Ah, well! The higher you stand, the more you see, & Fordyce was in a position to take a good all-round look at the possibilities that were coming to him. A child! A little child! A child of his very own! Oh, the divine gift! And the good man studied to deserve it & to make the best of it, even while his heart still fluttered between anxiety & an ecstasy of joy.

Ellen said nothing when she saw him trudge far evening with the rather heavy-looking volumes in quest of which he consulted the Free Public Library. He would have given much to read to her, & she would have loved to have him do so: but - well, there are

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are little meals of delicacy between the poorest
human hearts which you can't do violence to yourself
by tearing down. So this was what John did; he
put a little printed book mark & his wife had given
him ~~in~~ rather ostentatiously ~~in~~ in ~~the~~ ~~pages~~
places he meant her to look at. Of course she took
the hint, & as she read she was awed with the
conviction that she was already the conservator of
some share at any rate, of the interests of the world.

How good people are if you only take them the
right way! Little Mrs. Lodge would have called herself
a very common place little woman - always excepting
what she was to John. But the determination
with which she set herself to a dutiful way of
life was - heroic in a quiet way. No little
special indulgences for her, if you please! She
was not, for example, punctuated by nature. But -
now, how exactly to the minute each meal
was served, & she, ready to sit down to it. How
she timed herself in all her occupations - so
long for the bedroom - so long for preparing
dinner - & how she chided herself if she exceeded
her time. How careful & simple she was in her
eating, how she excluded 'wine & strong drink';
may, she had still a girlish weakness for 'chocolate',
but she would not let John indulge her with a
single pennyworth! How neat she became.

Lodge

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Ellen had always been rather given to 'unassuming' dressers, for example, leaving them so. But now, not so: the good girl constrained herself to a neatness & precision that made her laugh & say "Can this little old woman be?"

By the way, what arrogance it is in us middle-aged people to look down upon a 'mere girl' as wife & mother! The Bible says nothing about it, but we are very sure, ^{from} the sweetness & sweetness of her behaviour, that the Virgin Mary must have been a 'mere girl' when she became the most blessed amongst mothers. At what age will you find the dutifulness, the power of governing yourself & the thing you ought - which a good girl shows? But John Fordyce was a woman & a mother, & we wish to treat her with due respect, but - she was not yet nineteen! And John, the very sturdy John himself, had not seen his twenty-fifth birthday. All hail young couples, & young parents! No doubt - they are the sturdiest labourers in the vineyard of the world's progress.

And it was not only her outward life Ellen ruled: she revived her old taste for poetry. She came across some one saying, that one ought to read some good poetry every day: and she did: to John when she got a chance - she had a pleasant voice & was a practiced reader - when he was over by herself. Her very thoughts ran in melodious measures. Fordyce had been encouraged to add to his